

FILIPINO-AMERICANS



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Filipino-American Culture

I. Description of Culture

A. Demographics

- There are 1,159 Filipinos in Maine (2000).
- There are 1,850,314 Filipinos in the United States (2000).
- Filipinos are one of the fastest growing minorities in the U.S.
- In 2003, over 45,000 Filipinos immigrated to the U.S. and became legal residents
- One sixth of the total immigrants to the U.S. are Filipinos.
- One million of the seven million foreign-born residents in the U.S. are from the Philippines.

B. Brief History

- 7,107 islands make up the Philippines.
- Spain ruled the Philippines from 1560-1898.
- The United States ruled the Philippines from 1898-1946, when the Philippines were granted full independence.
- There are several cultural influences from Malay, China, Papua, India, Polynesia, Japan, and America.
- Migration: most of the immigrants to the U.S. prior to WWII were men. Since 1960, the number of female immigrants has increased, especially healthcare professionals.
- Since the 1970's, the Philippines have supplied over 35,000 nurses to the United States, the most of any other foreign country.

C. Foods

- Cuisine has Chinese, Malay, Spanish, and Mexican influences.
- Filipino foods are often given Spanish names.
- Fish, oyster, squid, pork, chicken are the preferred meats. Not much beef is eaten in the Philippines.
- Barbecued sticks of meat or seafood are popular snacks.
- Standard dishes are served with jasmine or sticky rice.
- Meat and vegetables are cooked with vinegar and garlic.
- Other favorites include:
 - A variety of soups
 - Local fruits in syrup
 - *Flan* (custard)

- *Lumpia* (eggrolls)
- *Pancit* (noodles mixed with vegetables and meat)
- *Siomai* (dumplings)
- *Lechon* (spit-roasted pig)
- Common spices are saffron and paprika.
- Filipino Americans also eat American foods such as burgers, fried chicken, steaks, sandwiches, and salads.

D. Dress

- The national costume is the *barong tagalong* for a man, which is a loose, heavily-embroidered shirt worn over the trousers. It has a closed collar with short sleeves for day wear or long, cuffed sleeves for formal occasions.
- Female folk dancers wear bright and colorful dresses.
- Many garments are handmade and some have fine detailing.
- Jeans and t-shirts are common among the younger Filipinos.
- In the United States, Filipinos wear typical American clothing.

E. Language/ Communication/ Ethnic Groups

- There are 120 ethnic groups, including Warays, Tagalogs, Cebuanos, Bicolos, or Ilocanos.
- The Philippines has been the world's second-largest English-speaking nation.
- The national language was Filipino (based on Tagalog) since 1946.
- The national language was changed in 1973 to Pilipino (also based on Tagalog and other Philippine languages).
- There are about 80 dialects within the Philippines.
- The language has been influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, English, and Spanish.
- English is spoken throughout the Philippines, especially for commerce and politics.
- Written communication is typically in English, while oral communication is often in Taglish (a combination of Tagalog and English).
- Spanish is not commonly spoken today in the Philippines. However, Tagalog includes several thousand Spanish words.
- The majority of Filipino names are Spanish based, due to Spanish colonizing and Christianizing in the Philippines.
- Standards of beauty are Spanish based: lighter skin is considered beautiful.
- Filipino values include the concepts of:
 - Pakikisama*: supporting others despite your own desires
 - Utang ng loob*: reciprocation. One is considered to be in debt until one pays back gifts and favors.
 - Hiya*: shame. One must help others and reciprocate, or one will experience shame.
 - Amor Proprio*: Following these principles will raise one's self esteem.

F. Arts

- Traditional theatre has largely been replaced by Western entertainment.
- Folk dancing in full costume is still performed.
- A love of music includes composing songs, playing guitar, singing love songs (*kundimans*) and singing karaoke.

G. Holidays

- Christmas (celebrated for nine days before Christmas by attending novena Masses. This tradition has been altered since coming to the U.S.). Traditions include hanging the star lantern (*parol*) in the front window, displaying the nativity scene, and offering a basket of fruit and the national flower.
- Easter.
- All Saints Day (Nov. 1st). This is a day to celebrate ancestors. Families go to the cemetery to clean and decorate the gravesite of ancestors. Families bring food for a picnic and make a plate for the deceased so they may come back and join in the meal. Sometimes the families dig up the bones of the ancestors to take photographs with them.
- People Power Day (February 25th). This is a celebration of non-violent demonstration, commemorating when the people of the Philippines forced their president to step down from power by protesting.
- National Heroes Day (August 31st). Various national heroes are honored.
- Labor Day (May 1st)
- The Feast of San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist)
- New Year's Day (celebrated with fireworks)
- Black Nazarene Procession (a life-sized statue of Jesus is carried through the streets).
- *Ati-Atihan* (Filipino version of Mardi Gras) celebrated the third week in January
- Good Friday
- *Flores de Mayo* (in honor of the Virgin Mary)
- Independence Day (June 12th)
- Birthdays, baptisms, and weddings are often elaborate affairs.
- Many other festivals are celebrated in different regions of the Philippines.

H. Religions and Beliefs

- The Philippines is the only Christian country in Asia.
- 92% are Christian (85% Catholic and 7% Protestant).
- 5% are Muslim.
- Catholicism influences political, social, and health beliefs.
- Spanish missionaries, especially the Jesuits, did not condemn the Filipinos' offering of sacrifices and prayers to harvest spirits. Instead they substituted patron saints of fishermen and farmers, forming a Filipino Catholicism known as "folk Christianity" (*Bulatao*).

- Christian Missionaries are still active in the Philippines.
- Novenas and Catholic Charismatic movements are still popular with Filipino-Americans.
- Minority religions include Islam, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, Baptist, Mormon, Buddhism, Taoism, the Philippine Independent Church, and indigenous animism.

I. Education

- The school system in the Philippines is based on the American system, but children receive their diploma at age 16.
- More than 70% of Filipino immigrants to the United States have more than a high school education.
- More women have collegiate and graduate degrees than men. However females have a lower average income than men.
- Education is valued and the Philippines nation is considered one of the most-schooled countries in Asia.
- Their literacy rate is 95%; only 87% are of functional literacy.

II. **Family, Relationships, and Roles**

- Values are based on Christian and Asian cultures.
- Originally a patriarchal society under Spanish rule, Filipino men and women are now considered equals.
- The father is head of the household, but the mother has a high position and often serves as family treasurer and housekeeper.
- Extended family lives together.
- Closely knit families are highly valued.
- Elders are treated with respect and are cared for at home as they age.
- Grandparents usually tend to the children while both parents work.
- Children are much loved and given a great deal of freedom while they are young.
- When children get old enough they are expected to help out the family by working.
- At about age 13, children take on more responsibilities at home.
- Coming-out parties are still held for young debutants.
- It is traditional for the girl to ask her father permission before dating a young man.
- Filipinos tend to marry young, after a courtship process.
- Dowry refers to gifts given to the bride by the groom's family.
- Traditionally, the bridegroom assumed all the responsibility for the wedding dress and celebration, but now expenses are apt to be shared.
- The wife's married name is added to her maiden name and her children have her maiden name as their middle name.
- Individuals are thought of as family, whether it is by blood, marriage, or close friendship.

- High value is placed on inter-dependence of family members.
- The group is put ahead of the individual.
- Family loyalty engenders family support.
- Families try to avoid disagreements and conflict.
- Third parties are often used as intermediaries.
- Open displays of anger or aggression are discouraged.
- Filipinos regard confrontation and directness as being rude.
- They respect the feelings of others, even strangers.
- They value basic honesty and good humor.
- They do not believe in taking advantage of others.

III. Concept of Work/Play/Time

- Filipinos value hard work.
- Philippine nurses are well known for their quality of care and professionalism. They have the advantage of already speaking English.
- Favorite leisure activities include:
 - Doing shopping and going to markets
 - Playing basketball, *sipa* (similar to volleyball), *piko* (hopscotch), tennis, and golf
 - Listening to music
 - Enjoying internet café/chat rooms, video games, and movies.
- Women play Chinese mah jongg, do cross-stitching, and combine socializing with work.
- Women don't usually drink alcohol.
- Men drink alcohol as early as high school.
- Men enjoy playing cards, watching sporting events, going fishing, hanging out, playing guitar, gambling, and racing.

IV. Health/Healthcare Considerations

A. Health

- Filipino elders have a higher incidence of diabetes and coronary heart disease than whites
- Filipino children are less likely than non-Hispanic white children to miss school due to injury or illness, to have learning disabilities or be on prescription medicine for over three months.
- Filipinos, like other Asian groups, are considered at risk of somatization due to their suppression of emotions.
- They may seek healthcare services for physical symptoms that may be related to stress

B. Healthcare

- An outreach effort is needed to help Filipinos access and navigate the American medical establishment, especially regarding primary and preventive care.
- Even though Filipinos have an understanding of the English language and are able to speak English to some degree, they may not understand medical terminology.
- Professional or religious counseling is rarely sought; Filipinos are hesitant to discuss personal issues.

C. Traditional healing and beliefs

- In the Philippines, traditional healers address spirituality in their treatment, sometimes using prayer, holy oil, massage, and acupuncture.
- Herbal remedies and medicinal teas are used for healing.
- A traditional Filipino cultural belief is that the cause of illness is due to spiritual reasons, such as God, witchcraft, and spirits.
- Sicknesses are part of God's plan for a person (his or her destiny).
- Some Filipinos may avoid medical treatment, leaving things up to God.
- Filipinos cope through prayer, hope, faith, suffering silently, and avoiding complaining.
- Accepting pain is a chance to grow spiritually and atone for past sins.
- Healthcare is viewed as a fix-all, but if there is a clash with Filipino traditional medicine, it may replace Western medicine.
- Clients may make offers of gifts or food in observance of *utang ng loob*.

D. Values

- Patients may avoid pain medication due to fear of becoming addicted, fear of losing control, or fear of being a nuisance. Pain needs to be assessed by watching body language.
- Filipinos value modesty, privacy, and confidentiality.
- They tend not to ask questions, being very polite.
- They are not comfortable expressing emotions in public, since they do not want to lose face. Support groups and group therapy may not be helpful.

E. Death

- Traditional Filipinos may avoid living wills and preparing for death, as they do not want to tempt fate.
- Assisted suicide is not permitted, but withholding life support and pain management is allowed.

- Family members may want to take over care of the patient either in the hospital or at home.
- A death ritual involves the Novena (saying prayers every night for nine days after a death). Family members take turns watching over the body. On the ninth night, family and friends hold a feast (*atang*) in which they eat favorite foods of the deceased. They also set a place at the table for the deceased.
- Visiting hours should be extended to allow the family to mourn.

F. Family

- Family-centered treatment would be most effective when dealing with Filipino patients
- Do not directly criticize the individual or family.
- Be aware of possible “cultural conflict” among different family generations due to varying degrees of acculturation.
- Family should be included in healthcare decisions.
- They may not want the patient to know his or her prognosis.
- Patients need family members (even extended family) present at all times during their illness. Be prepared for a “family reunion”.
- Never address an older Filipino by his or her first name.
- Even when addressing older siblings, Filipinos use titles of respect rather than first names or nicknames.

V. **Suggestions for healthcare practitioners**

- Include and respect family members.
- Be flexible about rules regarding visiting hours, number of visitors, and immediate family. Provide extra chairs in the patient’s room.
- Inquire whether herbal treatments are being used.
- Be concerned about pain control.
- Consider the patient’s religious beliefs and values.
- Encourage healthcare access and help patients understand the American healthcare system and medical terminology.
- Provide an interpreter and possibly a Catholic priest.
- Be concerned about miscommunication if the patient and family revert to speaking in their own language.
- Consider the effects of stress on illness.
- Make provisions for privacy and modesty.

VI. **Other Considerations**

- Because Filipinos have some understanding of the American language and culture, they don’t stay in large groups when they move to the United States.

- They may have less family support and fewer resources, which may increase their stress level.
- They may have issues with childcare, which was formerly performed by family.

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